



The Five-Step Interview Process

interview
steps

Goal

Suggested Actions

step
1

Cultivate a comfortable environment and put the taxpayer at ease.

- Introduce yourself; engage in small talk (discuss the weather, difficulty in locating the site, apologize if long wait, etc.).
- Explain the tax return preparation process—the interview, how the information they provide will assist you in determining whether they must file a return, their eligibility for tax credits, etc.
- Allow the taxpayers to share any expectations, needs, and/or concerns by asking whether they have questions before beginning and encouraging them to ask questions throughout the process.
- Be friendly and respectful and speak clearly and simply.

step
2

Use active listening skills.

- Watch for nonverbal listening cues (tone of voice, body language, eye contact, etc.).
- Listen, then respond by restating, paraphrasing, and/or encouraging further dialogue.

step
3

Review the taxpayer's responses to the intake questions (Form 13614-C or equivalent).

- When you start the interview, use one or two open-ended questions, for example, 'Was there anyone else who lived in your home besides the people listed on this form'; this is essential information for determining Head of Household filing status.
- Confirm all the information completed by the taxpayer on the Intake form (Form 13614-C or equivalent).
- If the taxpayer's return does not fall within the scope of the program, (1) courteously explain that volunteer services are limited to those who fall within the scope of the program, (2) Encourage the taxpayer to use the intake sheet in working with another tax service, and (3) thank the taxpayer for coming and express regret you cannot assist them.
- Review all the information documents presented by the taxpayer including W-2s, 1099s, 1098s, etc.
- Scan the information for completeness.
- Ask probing questions to clarify issues.

step
4

Working with the taxpayer, complete the critical intake questions (page 2 of Form 13614-C or equivalent).

- Don't assume—use the interview tips and decision trees in Publication 4012 to confirm:
 - Marital status (filing status)
 - Number of qualifying exemptions
 - Eligibility for child tax credit
 - Eligibility for the earned income credit

step
5

Advise taxpayer of the next steps.

- Restate the return preparation process, quality review procedures, signature and recordkeeping requirements, etc. Make sure you have good contact information in case there are electronic filing issues.